

VZCZCXRO2296
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2421/01 2170543
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 040543Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8637
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002421

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: (SBU) KARBALA'S LARGEST JAIL BURSTING AT SEAMS.

(U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified. Handle Accordingly. Not for Internet distribution.

(U) This is a PRT Karbala reporting cable.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Karbala's largest jail (technically a pre-trial detention facility) is filled beyond capacity. Because the province does not have a prison and the regional prison in al-Hillah also is full, Karbala's jail also houses post-trial detainees, including ten people (one female) convicted of capital crimes. The facility -- a converted office building -- is in good condition and well-run, and there have been no complaints of human rights violations. The long-term solution to alleviate the overcrowding is the construction of a larger, modern jail in Karbala. End Summary.

Chief Judge's Perspective

[1](#)2. (SBU) On June 22, PRT officers met Karbala Chief Appellate judge Abid Nour Farhan al-Fatlawi at his office near the Government Center complex. PRT Karbala has a good working relationship with Abid Nour, who is a candid critic of Karbala's shortcomings. Abid Nour described the jail as badly overcrowded, but clean and safe. He said convicted felons unfortunately are housed with other inmates, but that this so far has produced no incidents.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Abid Nour stated that Karbala's investigative judges are required to visit the province's jails to assess conditions, something they reportedly do several times per month. Asked about changes or improvements implemented recently, Abid Nour said that in response to complaints about the food, a new contractor was hired and the inmates are now satisfied with their meals. A new generator provides power 24/7. He noted that another complaint is access to medical care, but doctors and other health care professionals now visit the jail more frequently. (Note: We heard from other contacts that scabies is widespread at the jail and that the chief complaint was a lack of medicine with which to treat it. End Note.)

Full House

[1](#)4. (SBU) PRT officers visited the jail, which occupies the ground floor of a converted office building approximately 500 meters from the Government Center (the top two floors of the three-story structure contain police offices). According to jail officials, the prison was built to accommodate a maximum of 250 persons. However, it currently houses 354, including seven women. Ten of the inmates are awaiting execution for capital crimes, including a woman convicted of murdering her husband. Because of the lack of space, convicted felons are housed with those convicted of lesser offenses.

[1](#)5. (SBU) All seven women occupy a segregated, windowless ward secured behind a locked gate on the north side of the building. It has one toilet and one shower, and the women sleep on foam mattresses on the floor. The building's main

entrance is on the west side, and processing of arrestees is undertaken at the intake holding area on the east or back side. The south half of the building contains four cells varying in size from 25 to approximately 40 square meters. The two smallest cells house those awaiting trial. Each contains some 50 men and one toilet. The two larger cells house those convicted of misdemeanors and felonies. Each contains about 125 inmates, two toilets, and two showers. As with the women, the men sleep on foam mattresses on the floor. Jail officials allowed PRT officers to take photographs.

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

16. (SBU) The prison has a small outdoor exercise area enclosed within a cage. The building is clean and has been recently painted. Light and air conditioning provided by the new generator was ample; however, the electrical system itself appears potentially hazardous.

17. (SBU) In his cramped office, the warden told PRT officers that the inmates are able to exercise once per day -- in shifts -- for approximately an hour. He confirmed that the regional prison (technically a post-trial facility) in al-Hillah is full, commenting that 20 convicted felons sent there from Karbala recently had been returned because of a lack of space. He noted that because the police are scrupulous when it comes to respecting human rights, there have been no complaints of abuse. Asked what he thought was necessary to improve the jail, the warden was blunt: Only a new facility can solve the overcrowding. The current

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building was not designed to be a jail and cannot be expanded.

Comment

18. (SBU) Karbala needs a larger jail and the south central provinces need an expanded regional prison. Both are long-term fixes for problems likely to worsen in the near term. Karbala's status as a holy place renders the construction of a prison in the city as a non-starter. The province is fortunate not to be subject to complaints of human rights abuses, but overcrowding at the jail -- and particularly the mingling of hardened criminals with lesser offenders -- make an unfortunate incident likely. The likelihood of ramped-up arrests as the Shabaaniya approaches later this month will add further pressure to a facility already bursting at the seams. End Comment.
CROCKER